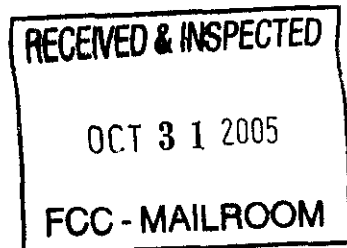


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Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554

In the Matter of)	WT Docket No. 05-235
)	RM-10781, RM-10782, RM-10783,
)	RM-10784, RM-10785, RM-10786,
Amendment of Part 97 of the Commission's Rules)	RM-10787, RM-10805, RM-10806,
To Implement WRC-03 Regulations Applicable to)	RM-10807, RM-10808, RM-10809,
Requirements for Operator Licenses in the)	RM-10810, RM-10811, RM-10867,
Amateur Radio Service)	RM-10868, RM-10869, RM-10870

I write this comment as a non-member of the amateur radio community. I am not a license holder and have approached this controversy from the viewpoint of a neutral outsider. I agree with dissenting members of the amateur community in believing that the FCC should not remove the telegraphy testing requirements for advanced amateur radio licenses.

I. Amateur Radio Regulations Key to Success or Failure of HAM Radio as a Hobby

The primary purpose of amateur radio licensing regulations is to preserve and protect a viable amateur radio community. As part of this larger mission the regulations themselves state that the basis and purposes of the amateur radio regulations include:

§ 97.1 Basis and purpose.

(b) Continuation and extension of the amateur's proven ability to contribute to the advancement of the radio art.

(c) Encouragement and improvement of the amateur service through rules which provide for advancing skills in both the communication and technical phases of the art.

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(d) Expansion of the existing reservoir within the amateur radio service of trained operators, technicians, and electronics experts.

47 C.F.R. § 97.1

As part of these purposes, the FCC should make any and all changes to the licensing testing requirements with a strong consideration for the effects upon the “encouragement and improvement of the amateur service” and “advancing skills” of those involved in the hobby. The graduated licensing requirements are the key method whereby the FCC encourages improvement and advances skills. By giving incentives to members of the amateur community for their increased training and expertise, the Morse code and other graduated requirements help fulfill the agencies role in living up to the purposes espoused in § 97.1. While many will argue that dropping the Morse code requirement will fulfill the expansion purpose mentioned in part § 97.1(d), this must still be counterbalanced with those objectives mentioned in parts § 97.1(b) & (c). In addition, as I explain in section III of this comment, dropping the Morse code requirement is not even likely to lead to a considerable expansion of the hobby, especially among young people.

II. Role of Amateurs and Hobbyists in American Society and Democracy

Amateurs and hobbyists have always played a crucial role in American democracy and economy. In fact, most the founding fathers of our country, with whom the public has always been so enamored, were mostly amateurs in the variety of fields in which they worked. The definition of the enlightenment era renaissance man was one who hobbyed in a plethora of areas of interest. Jefferson dabbled in horticulture, mechanics, politics, literature, and a host of other interests. While he and many others of his

generation were not considered professional or even adept in all of the areas in which they hobbyed, their accomplishments and the experience they gained led to the development and founding of our country. Specialization of labor and the end of landed gentry has made so-called renaissance men fewer and fewer, however, the amateur and hobbyist still thrives in modern America. Today most citizens choose only one or two hobbies to pursue, yet their experience in an area outside of their career provides the well-rounded individuals on which democracy is founded.

Our country has continually found itself indebted to amateurs and hobbyists for innovation and expertise in time of need. Farmers experienced from self-fixing their own tractors provided many needed mechanics and equipment operators during the World Wars. Many major innovations and inventions have been developed at the hands of pioneering hobbyists. Interestingly enough, Samuel B. Morse was an art student and total amateur in the areas of electricity and science, when he invented telegraphy.¹

While the telecommunications industry and many in government now propose auctioning off significant portions of the spectrum for commercial use, the preservation of a viable amateur radio community requires that adequate portions of the spectrum be preserved for the use of hobbyists. Certainly, there are great gains to be had from commercial applications in the currently unused or amateur portion of the spectrum, however, these innovations should not come at the detriment of a viable amateur radio community.

Just as important as the preservation of spectrum space, is the preservation of adequate and appropriate licensing thresholds that maximize the potential of the amateur community, while sustaining an assured level of competency for operators. The

¹ "Samuel F. B. Morse," National Inventors Hall of Fame, http://www.invent.org/hall_of_fame/106.html

encouragement of a robust amateur radio community and hobby necessitates that the government take a leading role in encouraging advancement and education of the membership. Eliminating Morse code only further degrades the graduated licensing requirements by which the government helps encourage education and innovation within the hobby. With the amateur radio community, the government has a unique opportunity through continuing direct regulation to support and encourage the great American tradition of amateur innovators and hobbyists.

III. Elimination of Telegraphy Will Not Necessarily Increase the Number of Young People in the Hobby

Even though I come down on the side of keeping a Morse code licensing requirement in some form or another, I would like to dispel what seems to be the primary motivation for the removal of Morse code testing requirements: the idea that said requirements are a reason for the low number of young people involved and its removal will lead to increased youth participation in the hobby. It is true that the average age of a HAM radio operator is 52.² However, the reasons for this relatively high average age is likely not attributable to the Morse code requirement. Quite frankly, radio technology does not appeal to younger generations the way it did to those in the baby boom and older. The generation that makes up the majority of HAM radio operators grew up in the age where radio had reached its peak and as television was still in its relative infancy. Spurred on by the radio shows of the 30's, 40's, and 50's and the development of handheld short-wave radios, this generation was drawn into the hobby partly as a result of

² Comments of Jim Haynie, president of the American Radio Relay League (ARRL), reported by Chuck McCutcheon, Newhouse News Service (2003), <http://www.newhousenews.com/archive/mccutcheon062603.html>

the gee whiz factor that radio communications had in the first 60 years of the 20th century. Recent generations, mine included, grew up in an age of cassette tapes, CDs, mp3s, and cable/satellite television. Radio has played an increasingly less prominent role in American culture, and as a result fewer young people are impressed by the technology and less likely to become involved in the hobby. Similar trends can be seen occurring today, where other old fashioned pastimes such as quilting are threatened with extinction. The Morse code requirement is neither the primary nor even a motivating reason that younger people shy away from the amateur radio field. Instead, the leading reason is a more difficult to resolve generational/cultural gap. Therefore, I do not believe that the removal of the Morse code licensing requirement will lead to an influx of young people into the hobby.

IV. Need for Legacy Continuation of Morse Code Communications

While, I do not believe that the elimination of a Morse code testing requirement will mean complete doom for the Morse code system in the short term, I am concerned that it could seriously endanger the future of a viable Morse code community in the long term. There is a need to preserve viable forms of legacy communications. In this past century, the United States has utilized seemingly obsolete forms of communications to the great benefit of national security. The almost dead Navaho language was utilized during World War II as an effective form of cryptographic communications.³ The Comanche and Choctaw languages were also used in a similar manner dating back to World War I.⁴ While many Native American languages had virtually ceased to exist as a

³ See "Code Talker," Wikipedia, Online Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Code_talkers

⁴ Id.

result of Native American cultural assimilation, the continued viability of a small number of Navaho, Comanche, and Choctaw speakers allowed the U.S. to communicate clearly during war in almost complete secrecy. While Morse code may never yield a strong cryptographic usefulness, there could be many potential applications for the nearly obsolete technology in the near and far future. The reliability and simplicity of Morse code can be especially useful in emergency situations. As a random colloquial example, Morse code was utilized near the conclusion of the blockbuster movie *Independence Day* to simultaneously communicate internationally in a situation where an electromagnetic disturbance had effectively destroyed other more advanced forms of communication. While I am doubtful that we will face a mass alien invasion in the near or far future, electromagnetic disturbances (whether naturally solar induced or even potentially as a result of future weapons technology/terrorism) are a realistic problem for present and future communications. Ham radio operators have already taken a critical role in natural disasters, such as hurricane Katrina, and will likely serve similar roles in future disasters.⁵

The retention of a Morse code licensing requirement will help preserve a viable form of legacy communication. The telegraphy testing requirement as it stands today, even though it only requires a measly 5 wpm to achieve a passing score, still provides a great deal of exposure for the dying art-form of Morse code. The current requirement ensures that a skilled community of Morse code operators will continue to exist in the United States, and gives a basic amount of exposure to those receiving advanced licenses, so that at least a basic knowledge of the technology is assured. In addition, requiring applicants for advanced licenses to have basic telegraphy skills may induce some of these

⁵ "Ham radio operators to the rescue after Katrina," Gary Krakow; <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/9228945/>, Sept. 6, 2005.

applicants to further their education within the telegraphy field and develop much needed expertise.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, I think the amateur community as well as the country as a whole will benefit from retaining the telegraphy testing requirements as part of the amateur radio licensing process. At the least, the requirement should be retained for the Amateur Extra license class.

Sincerely,

Michael Carpenter
10/27/2005